

QUANTOCK MINISTRIES

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*A Bible teaching and preaching ministry
for the Christian community*

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JOB 23 v 10 – “HE KNOWS THE WAY THAT I TAKE”

This is a true story, full of rich meaning for all believers, in all ages, who grapple with the uncertainties of life and the searching question of where God is to be found in it all. The first two chapters and the last are written as prose while the rest are written as poetry, but this does not in any way suggest the story is just an allegory. Many historical incidents in many cultures have been immortalised through ballads, etc, and there is no need to regard Job any differently. Ezekiel (14 v 14) and James (5 v 11) both viewed Job as a real person, and their books have the full authority of scripture. Luther says of Job “it is magnificent and sublime, as no other book of scripture”, and Lord Tennyson thought Job was “the greatest poem of ancient or modern times”. Perhaps the best evidence of the truth of this book is the amazing influence it has had on countless lives over the centuries, bringing true calm, faith, and acceptance of God’s presence in the face of dire suffering.

Job may well have lived sometime between the Flood and Abram, probably after Babel. The original story was written in an ancient Hebrew dialect, which is why some of the words and phrases cannot be translated with full certainty, but probably the story had been handed down earlier through many generations by word of mouth. Job was a wealthy farmer, well-known and much revered in the lands to the east of the Mediterranean. He had a firm knowledge of the one true God and lived a life of godly fear and discipline. In the first two chapters we see the devastation Satan brings upon the man – touching his family, his wealth, and his own health. We also have a very important insight into the interaction of God and Satan. In chapters 3 to 37 there is a discussion between Job and his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, joined later by the young man Elihu. Then God speaks out of the storm in chapters 38 to 41, an amazing portion of scripture. Finally, in chapter 42 Job’s eyes are opened to the purpose of the whole experience and he is restored and blessed. In this study we will just consider seven short but important lessons.

1. Satan may be powerful, but he is still under the authority of God.

Angelic beings (“sons of God”) commune directly with God (e.g., 1 Kings 22 v 19 and Matthew 18 v 10) and here Satan, the accuser, and the fallen chief of angels, has Job brought to his attention. Verse 7 shows that Satan is not omnipresent as God is; he can only be in one place at any one time for he is just a created being. We are wrong to assume Satan is everywhere, but he can influence events and people everywhere through his legions of evil spirits (fallen angels) and the false ideas (schemes) he puts in people’s minds (see John 8 v 44 and Ephesians 6 v 11). These include all false religions and philosophies that have so devastated humanity over the centuries. However, Satan can only do what God permits him to do and it is good to remember that we who are in Christ are God’s children, not Satan’s. More often than we ever realise we are protected from falling under his influences but sometimes, as with Job, it is our heavenly Father’s plan to allow us to experience something of Satan’s power in order to deal with some area of our lives that needs attention (Hebrews 12 v 4 – 12). Real obstinacy in our hearts might even lead to God “giving us over” to satanic influence (Romans 1 v 24, 26 and 28 and 1 Corinthians 5 v 5), but the Christian must never see this as punishment or judgement but rather as training and discipline. This whole method of God’s dealings with us can only happen because we still live in a fallen world.

2. Is our suffering directly linked to sin?

This was the basic argument of Job's friends, and in a general sense it is. Adam's original sin (the Fall) was the effective cause of God's Curse and the subsequent regime of Satan which continues to this very day. But Job's friends accused him of being a secret sinner, which he vehemently denied, and which ultimately led to God's censure of them. The important distinction to be borne in mind is between judgement and consequences. As we have seen in 1 above, God often uses Satan and his activity to teach us the consequences of our own disobedience and, as in Job's case, in order to teach and train us in greater godliness. But we must not look on evil and suffering as a judgement. Our sins were judged on the cross and Jesus paid the price; He did not come to judge us but to save us! Looking at our sufferings and trials as a judgement (very much part of the theology of some branches of Christianity) leads to the burden of a guilt complex, which is quite contrary to the promised joy of our salvation (Romans 8 v 1).

3. Job does not believe he is a secret sinner, and so he demands answers from God.

After denying that he has a secret evil life Job spends much of the time expressing his distress that he is not getting any answers from God as to what is going on. His thinking tends to go round in circles, in his extreme frustration, in a manner that would lead many a lesser person to a mental breakdown. He realises that God is doing something, but the lack of clear answers, together with the pain of his body and the agony of his grief, leads him to despair. His faith in God remains intact (19 v 25) and he somehow senses that God has the full right to allow his suffering (e.g., 1 v 22 and 2 v 10), but this does not make his pain any easier. For many Christians, if not most, the "dark night of the soul" is a periodic reality. We echo Job's words: "If only I knew where to find Him" (23 v 3). We know we are meant to "abide in Christ" and "walk in the Spirit", but if God is nowhere to be found and we have so many unanswered questions then we are left feeling very bereft.

4. When God does reveal Himself, answers become irrelevant.

When God eventually speaks, He fails to answer a single question that Job has posed. Indeed, God addresses a much deeper level of Job's being than his questioning mind; He speaks to his heart – to the very spirit of the man. As the Lord presents the immeasurable wonders of His creation - beyond time and space - and the immense grandeur of His plans, a new and true perspective consumes Job, and he enters a far higher level of understanding than he has ever experienced before. All the questions become meaningless and seeking answers becomes irrelevant. This experience is often repeated in scripture when divine revelation overtakes human despair. The fact that creation has been planned and executed with such beauty and design assures us that His plan for our lives has similar purpose and meaning (Romans 8 v 28). In the light of Job's experience why do so many Christians today feel obliged to adulterate God's glorious revelation through creation by denying the reality of His eternal power and divine nature as described in scripture, especially the opening chapters of Genesis? If we cannot declare the stupendous glory of God in bringing together the whole of creation exactly as He said, in the six literal days described in the Bible, then we have denied the fullness of that glory and failed to do what God did for Job – overcoming the futile questioning of human intellect by the compelling evidence that is all around us. It is no surprise that unbelieving man has so many unanswered questions; we have ruined our only answer by denying our foundational truth.

5. The consequence of God's revelation is repentance and faith.

Job's response in chapter 42 was to see that his former religious activity, based as it was on his own understanding, was but an empty shell. He had merely heard of God and mentally assented to that framework of understanding; now he could see God with the clear spiritual eyes of his soul, and his life would never be the same again (42 v 1 – 6). Jesus brought the same revelation as He overturned dependence on the mental formality of the Mosaic legal system and gave us the much deeper understanding of redemption, leading to the heart response of Thomas: "My Lord and my God". Paul went through just such a transformation, as he explained to the Philippians (Philippians 3 v 9) and declared to Timothy regarding his deepest convictions (2 Timothy 1 v 12). For Job, as for every true child of God, it was "not a confession of sin but an acknowledgement of his insignificance" (Heavenor).

6. The whole experience was an antidote to falseness in Job's walk with God.

It is amazing that God should bother with such detail. After all, Job was a believer and apparently lived a very God-fearing life. Were all the terrible circumstances God caused Job to pass through at Satan's hand really warranted by the eventual outcome? If our eternal destiny is to be with God does improvement in this brief life really matter? Isn't due formality in the Christian life sufficient? Such questions ignore the clear fact that this life is a time of preparation for our eternal life, and so seeking to be as true as possible to God now is vitally important; the rewards we receive in eternity depend on the degree of sanctification we allow God the Holy Spirit to develop within us in this life. But apart from all this, we are already part of the Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5 v 25b – 27), and it is the Lord's earnest desire to have true and deep fellowship with us now. He who asks us to abide in Him cannot abide any falseness spoiling this greatest of all loves.

7. The blessings of Job's restoration came through his compassionate prayer for his friends.

The Lord, who is in debt to no one, rewarded Job richly for his faithfulness under trial. But first Job was tested on the sincerity of his repentance and to ensure the lessons were well learnt. He had to pray for forgiveness for his friends who had so spitefully and falsely accused him. It would have been a very understandable response for Job to have balked at this after the way they had treated him. But such a response on Job's part would have shown that he was still operating at the level of human thought and feeling, rather than by the grace of Heaven so recently and wonderfully revealed to him. He did what was required of him without further demur. The right response on our part to our recognition of the powerless formality of much of our Christian witness today is a Holy Spirit-filled passion for the lost all around us. If we ourselves have experienced something of the pain of trials and the agony of God's silence, then as well as embracing that all-consuming revelation of His glory as Job did, we can only respond with a truly humble but earnest plea for the revelation of Jesus and His power and love to be given to many others. Then we shall be truly blessed through and through.

In the IVP New Bible Commentary, R S P Heaveron's study of Job contains this apt summary: "While the author [of Job's story] would certainly have recommended humility in any contemplation of the fact of suffering, he would not have advocated despair. He believes in a God who has the answer to human need. The appearance of men to counsel Job leads to controversy, disillusionment, and despair; the appearance of God leads to submission, faith, and courage. The word of man is unable to penetrate the darkness of Job's mind; the Word of God brings abiding light. The God of the theophany does not answer any of the burning questions that are debated so hotly throughout the course of the book; but He answers the need of Job's heart. He does not explain any phase of the battle; but He makes Job more than a conqueror in it."